



The newsletter of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

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Welcome to this first issue of the Evaluation Expert Network's newsletter. The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development operates under the responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. It aims to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of rural development programmes up until 2013.

This newsletter provides an awareness raising platform for the Network's activities and achievements. The newsletter is produced with a broad readership in mind and designed to meet the information needs of rural development evaluators, practitioners and decision makers. At least three new issues of the newsletter are produced each year. Every edition is published in English, French and German languages.

Articles and features within the newsletter provide information on evaluation related issues and inform about results of the work being carried out on different themes. These will vary in line with the Network's wide remit and might include topics such as methodologies for measuring particular environmental impact indicators, or examine challenges such as appraising options to ensure the long term mainstreaming of specific socio-economic recommendations.

This first issue of the newsletter puts the spotlight on the launch of the Evaluation Expert Network and sets the scene for future editions, starting in December 2008.

Your feedback is welcome

This newsletter is intended to be applicable, accessible and approachable for anybody dealing with the evaluation of rural development programmes and measures in the EU. We therefore welcome your feedback on the content presented and we would encourage you to provide suggestions regarding appropriate articles or regular features. Please send us your comments to info@ruralevaluation.eu

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Foreword

Message from Leo Maier, DG Agriculture & Rural Development: Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture, studies

The EU's rural areas cover over 90% of the Union's territory and are home to around half of the population of the 27 Member States. A wide range of different rural areas exist throughout Europe and the EU has allocated a budget of almost € 90 billion from its European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support rural development policy across the EU 27 during the period up to 2013.

Here at the European Commission's DG Agriculture and Rural Development we are acutely aware of the important role that evaluation plays in managing the EAFRD effectively. Evaluation provides us with the information that we need to know to advise and steer rural development policy in partnership with our national colleagues from the Member States.

Evaluation helps us understand in which way and to what extent the rural development programmes respond to the development needs of rural areas across the EU and so it is important that Member States and the European Commission have access to the highest quality evaluation tools. A new European Evaluation Network for Rural Development has now been launched by DG Agriculture and Rural Development with a dedicated remit to help provide these important management tools for EU rural development policy makers and practitioners.

Our main objective for the Evaluation Expert Network concentrates on increasing the use of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of EU rural development policies and programmes. This will be achieved by a wide range of activities that help to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of the rural development programmes.

Networking will be encouraged between stakeholders in order to create a genuine "common" approach to monitoring and evaluation. A Helpdesk support function has already been established to facilitate cooperation in this area, and to provide guidance on evaluation tools and methods. A team of experienced European experts has been recruited to staff the Helpdesk and a detailed work programme of technical tasks and information dissemination has also been agreed.

Responsiveness and relevance both feature strongly in the Helpdesk's communication philosophy and this newsletter will act as an important channel for raising awareness about the ongoing activities of the Evaluation Expert Network. A multilingual website will further facilitate uptake of the advice and guidance generated by Europe's leading evaluation specialists in rural development policy.

The Evaluation Expert Network has been designed to be useful and user-friendly. Its launch comes at a highly appropriate time, during the early stages of implementing the Member States' rural development programmes, when the quality of evaluation systems can be strengthened from the outset. I welcome the establishment of the Evaluation Expert Network and I encourage you to make good use of its resources.

Leo Maier,

*Head of Unit: Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture, studies
Directorate-General for Agriculture & Rural Development
European Commission*

Rural development and Evaluation 2007-2013

With a general move towards more accountability of policy making in the EU, the role of monitoring and evaluation has increased progressively over recent years. This is particularly true for the EU's rural development policy which relies on an array of evaluation data during delivery of its complex remit.

Rural development policy for the period 2007 to 2013 is set out in [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1698/2005](#). In comparison to the past, a new aspect of the policy is a greater emphasis on developing a coherent strategy for rural development across the EU as a whole. This is being achieved through the use of National Strategy Plans which are based on EU Strategic Guidelines for Rural development ([Council Decision of 20 February 2006](#)). While Member States can set priorities at the national or regional level, they are also required to keep in mind the overarching European objectives outlined in the EU Strategic Guidelines and maintain an appropriate balance between the four axes of development.¹

In order to assess progress towards objectives which have been set at Community and National levels, the evaluation of the rural development programmes has been reinforced and a [Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework \(CMEF\)](#) has been established. Introduction of the CMEF aims

to ensure the accountability of programmes and allow an assessment on the achievement of strategic objectives.

The Evaluation Expert Network will target its efforts to provide a dedicated set of technical support services and tools for evaluation functions established by national authorities, evaluation experts, and academic bodies dealing with evaluation in order to help uphold and improve the quality of evaluation work undertaken within the CMEF. This includes work in the following areas:

- Increasing capacity in the evaluation of rural development programmes;
- Increasing capacity in managing the evaluation process; and
- Sharing good practice in the evaluation of rural development programmes.

See the following section on the Evaluation Expert Network's Work Programme for more details about what this means in terms of practical CMEF support activities.

1. Axis 1: Improving competitiveness of farming and forestry, Axis 2: Environment and land management, Axis 3: Improving quality of life and diversification, Axis 4: Mainstreaming the LEADER approach.

CMEF (2007-2013)

- o "The common monitoring and evaluation framework shall be drawn up in cooperation between the Commission and the Member States ... (it) shall specify a limited number of common indicators applicable to each programme." (Council Regulation No 1698/2005 Article 80)
- o A list of common baseline, output, result and impact indicators for the rural development programmes form the CMEF (listed in Annex VIII of [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 1974/2006 of 15 December 2006](#)). Guidance has been published in a [handbook, including a series of guidance notes](#) by the European Commission.
- o Member States build on the CMEF by adding indicators, which reflect the unique national or regional character of their programmes.
- o Member States have to submit annual progress reports (from June 2008 to 2016) on the implementation of their programmes, including a summary of evaluation activities. The latter will take the form of separate mid-term and ex-post evaluations in 2010 and 2015 respectively.

Evaluation Expert Network Work Programme 2008

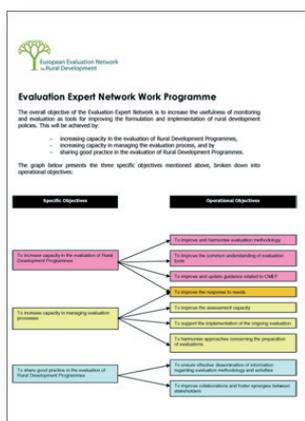
Based on the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development, the [Rural Development Regulation \(EC\) No 1698/2005](#) establishes three core objectives for EU rural development policy actions. These core objectives set the overall operational goals for Member States' national rural development strategies which aim to:

- Improve the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by support for restructuring, development and innovation;
- Improve the environment and the countryside by supporting land management; and
- Improve the quality of life in rural areas and encourage diversification of economic activity.

A consistent and effective approach to the evaluation of these core objectives is important at EU level and the Evaluation Expert Network has developed an extensive work programme to assist evaluation functions established by national authorities and evaluation experts, succeed in this complex task.

Annual work programmes are agreed with the Commission on the basis of proposals submitted by the Evaluation Helpdesk. However, the first work programme of the Evaluation Expert Network is a special case in that it only covers 9 months (April to December) and was established by the DG Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Work Programme presents three main strategic priorities (Specific Objectives) that are to be achieved within a number of sub tasks (Operational Objectives). [Read more about the objectives.](#)



Setting up the **Evaluation Helpdesk** has been one of the main tasks of the 2008 Work Programme. At the end of June, the Helpdesk was fully operational. The activities have included organising the Helpdesk premises and building the team, setting up operational systems, and launching promotional activities and tools.

A **thematic approach** has been adopted with a view to improving evaluation methodology and different themes will be prioritised on an annual basis. Three thematic issues have been selected for 2008.

- Guidelines for using High Nature Value (HNV) indicators;
- A common approach for identifying impacts of specific rural development measures in the context of multiple intervening factors; and
- A common method for addressing the evaluation of environmental impacts.

The Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development emphasise the preservation and development of high nature value farmland and forestry and traditional agricultural landscapes as one of the priority areas of rural development. Accordingly, the objective of promoting the preservation and development of high nature value farmland and forestry and traditional agricultural landscapes has been taken up in the CMEF, which refers, with one of its central indicators, to “high nature values”.

In view of making this indicator operational for the evaluation of rural development measures in all Member States, specific guidelines will be developed. The guidelines will aim at establishing a common definition of such an indicator as well as at identifying practical solutions for the adaptation of the indicator to region-specific conditions.

Preparatory work will also start soon on the other two themes and separate working papers will be produced later this year to provide practical, pragmatic guidance aimed at harmonising and

News in Brief

Meeting of expert group “Evaluation of Agricultural Measures”, Brussels, June 5th



A meeting of the “Evaluation of Agricultural Measures” expert group was held on June 5th. Membership of the group is open for two representatives from each Member State and over 50 participants attended the meeting at DG Agriculture & Rural Development in Brussels.

This meeting was chaired by Leo Maier, the new head of DG Agriculture & Rural Development’s evaluation unit, who opened the meeting and explained that the current informal expert group “Evaluation of Agricultural Measures” will be replaced by a formal expert group called “Expert committee on evaluation of Rural Development Programmes”. He mentioned that the tasks and the objectives of the expert group will be threefold: advise the Commission on the annual work programme of the Evaluation Expert Network; contribute to the choice and coordination of evaluation thematic work; monitor the implementation of ongoing evaluation (for further information, see the [Commission Decision of 20 February 2008 setting up the organisational structure for the European Network for Rural Development](#)). Member States will be asked to confirm their representatives on this Committee.

Mr Maier also highlighted the Evaluation Helpdesk and explained that its aim is to assist the Commission develop capacity and good practice in the evaluation of rural development programmes. He encouraged Member States to support the Helpdesk’s work, in particular the SWOT analysis and assessment of needs that will be completed by the end of this year as part of the 2008 Work Programme. As part of this assessment exercise, Focus Groups will be set up in the Member States during the month of September.

Additional information about these activities were presented by Helpdesk staff and the morning session finished with a lively round table discussion between experts about their experiences so far in establishing ongoing evaluation systems for the rural development programmes.

Two technical presentations were provided after lunch to help clarify issues surrounding quantified indicators in rural development programmes. Special attention was paid to work being progressed on the Axis 2 indicator measuring High Nature Value farm land.

The meeting concluded with positive feedback from the Member States who looked forward to an equally productive session when the Evaluation Expert Committee next meets on 15 December 2008.

All the presentations are available for download:

- [Evaluation Expert Network \(including new arrangements for the expert group\) – Dorota Nadolna, DG Agriculture and Rural Development](#)
- [Evaluation Helpdesk – Pascal Herry, EEIG RurEval](#)
- [Objectives for the Evaluation Expert Network – Dorota Nadolna, DG Agriculture and Rural Development](#)
- [Outline of the work programme 2008 – Pascal Herry, EEIG RurEval](#)
- [Thematic approach for 2008 – Dorota Nadolna, DG Agriculture and Rural Development](#)
- [SWOT-analysis of the evaluation system and assessment of needs. Presentation of the approach to carry out the SWOT analysis and the assessment of needs – Jean-Pierre Vercruyse, EEIG RurEval](#)
- [Improving the guidance document on the application of the High Nature Value impact indicator; Presentation of the approach to improve the guidelines – Jean-Pierre Vercruyse, EEIG RurEval](#)

Unique logo with brain-shaped branches



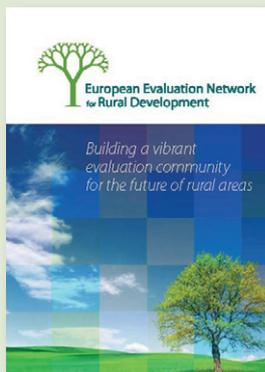
A logo for the new Evaluation Expert Network for Rural Development has been released to provide the Network with a unique branding. Pascal Herry, Team Leader at the Evaluation Helpdesk, highlighted the aims of the logo. “We wanted to achieve a unique branding for the Network that would be memorable and at the same time explain its core objectives. The tree reinforces our focus on rural areas and the brain-shaped branches mirror a ‘mind-mapping’ exercise associated with evaluation methodologies. People have commented on how aesthetically pleasing the overall image is and we look forward to our logo becoming a familiar icon within the EU evaluation community.”

Website launch



The website of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development has been launched on Europa. The website will act as an important information channel between the Evaluation Expert Network and its stakeholders. Content continues to build on a regular basis as the Network’s work programme progresses and a wide range of interactive advice and guidance will soon be hosted on the site. [Visit the website.](#)

Presentation leaflet gives introduction to new network



A leaflet which presents the Evaluation Expert Network and the role of the Helpdesk within the context of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework has been published.

Available to download in [EN](#) - [FR](#) - [DE](#). Alternatively for extra printed copies, you can [contact the Helpdesk](#).

New Evaluation Advice and Guidance

New guidance on best practice evaluation approaches for EU rural development policy will continue to be produced by the Network as an ongoing function. Preparations are underway for new guidance on High Nature Value indicators that will be featured in the next issue of this newsletter. In the meantime we would like to highlight the [CMEF Handbook](#) and its evaluation guidelines on the common indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

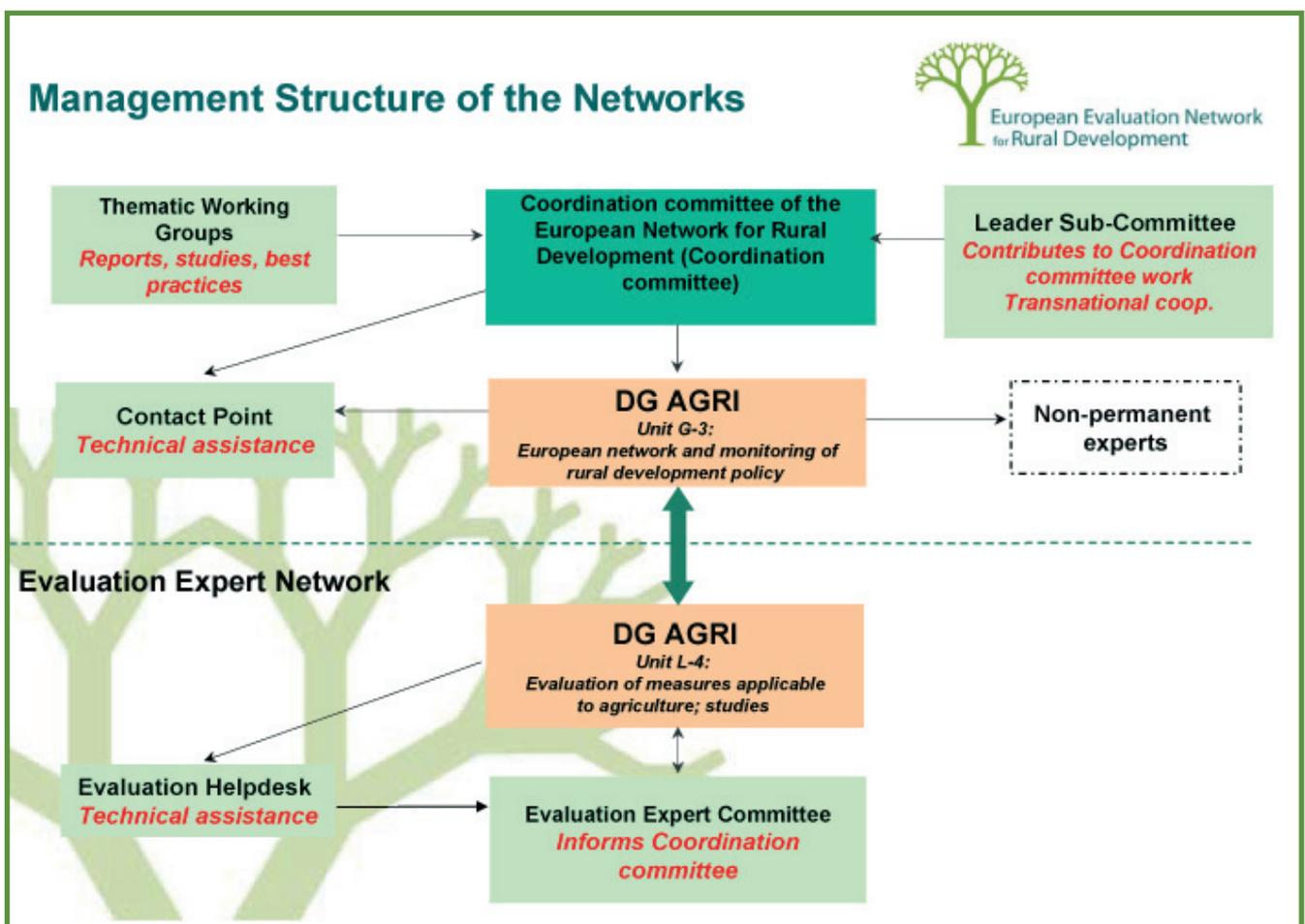
Who's who in the Evaluation Expert Network

The Evaluation Expert Network has been set up at the initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development to fulfil the evaluation related functions foreseen by [Article 67 \(e\) of Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1698/2005](#). Although it is an integral part of the wider European Network for Rural Development, it will work independently in its daily tasks.

Whereas the Evaluation Expert Network will be dealing with evaluation related issues, the European Network for Rural Development will cover the aspects related to the implementation of rural development programmes. However, the two units in DG AGRI who are managing these networks (i.e.

"Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture; studies" and "European network and monitoring of rural development policy") will be working closely to ensure synergies and good coordination.

A small core team of staff at the Evaluation Expert Network provide a Helpdesk function which acts as a contact point for the Network and manages all day to day operations from their Brussels office. There are four main positions: Team Leader, Evaluation Manager, Communication Manager and Administration Manager. These permanent staff members are supported by non-permanent staff, i.e. groups of experts on rural development evaluation across the EU-27.



A core group of five thematic experts provide the Helpdesk with a useful think-tank facility. Drawing on their experience in: the four axes of development; quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods; indicators; implementation practices; policy development; and managing transition processes in New Member States, the core group meet quarterly during their work on methodological support. The main roles of the Core team include: contributing to the establishment of evaluation methods and tools; helping to establish the annual work programme; contributing to the identification of themes to be covered by the Helpdesk; supporting the setting-up of and participating in thematic working groups. Other geographic experts will act as the 'relays' of the Helpdesk in the Member States.

Thematic working groups will be established every year. Their participants will be drawn from the Core Team of Experts, Geographic Experts and other external or associated experts, with very specific expertise, who will be involved on an ad hoc basis.

For further information, please visit the [who's who](#) page on the website.

In future issues of the newsletter, this section will profile key characters of the Helpdesk (permanent and non-permanent staff) and will present members of the network at large (national networks, evaluators of rural development programmes, other experts etc).

Network Events

Network events featured in this issue of the newsletter refer mainly to the Network's launch and initial activities. Keep an eye on the [news and events page](#) of our [website](#) for an up to date programme of ongoing Network activities.

March 31	DG Agriculture and Rural Development establishes the contract with RurEval EEIG to assist in the establishment and the management of the Evaluation Expert Network and to carry out the Helpdesk functions.
May 6 – 7	First meeting of the Core Group of Experts, Brussels
June 5	Meeting of the expert group "Evaluation of Agricultural Measures", Brussels
July 7 – 8	Second meeting of the Core Team of Experts, Brussels
September 3 - 4	Meeting of all geographic experts and third meeting of the Core Team of Experts, Brussels
October 24	High Nature Value (HNV) Workshop, Brussels
November 24 – 25	Fourth meeting of the Core Team of Experts, Brussels
December 15	Meeting of the Expert committee on evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, Brussels

Other Events

Here is a selection of recent events

<p>October 1-3</p>	<p><i>“Building for the Future: Evaluation in Governance, Development and Progress”</i>. Lisbon, Portugal. The European Evaluation Society’s biennial conference looked at how evaluation can play its part in helping society to work more effectively and fairly. It studied the relationship between evaluation ‘use’ and the development of ‘social capital’ which is all about strengthening social networks, improving institutions and adapting procedures.</p>
<p>October 6-7</p>	<p><i>“The new challenges for rural development in Italy: between Health Check and EU budget reform”</i>, Treviso, Italy This two day event, which was organised by the Italian Ministry for Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, in the framework of the Italian National Rural Network programme (Rete Rurale Nazionale – Italia), included a whole series of debates on rural development policies. The most relevant and topical themes of the CAP reform process were discussed. The programme included three workshops: 1) Governance models in Europe; 2) Beyond Health Check: new challenges for agriculture? 3) The competitiveness of the Italian Agri-Food System. For further information about the event, visit the website: http://www.politicheagricole.it/SviluppoRurale/Iscrizione_Evento/default.htm</p>
<p>October 16-17</p>	<p><i>“Europe’s rural areas in action: Facing the challenges of tomorrow”</i>. Limassol, Cyprus. This stocktaking conference looked at past achievements and began a discussion on the current and future challenges to be addressed by EU rural development policy in the years ahead. A plenary session with keynote speeches from representatives of the European institutions, including Commissioner Fischer Boel, and other organisations (INRA, RUPRI) was followed by five workshops. The subjects for discussion included adapting agriculture and forestry to climate change, harnessing the development potential in rural areas and improving delivery, successful governance and networking etc. The agenda also included a presentation of the European Network for Rural Development. The event was organised by the European Commission’s DG Agriculture & Rural Development in close cooperation with the Cypriot Government. Around 600 representatives of the European institutions, key European level interest groups and non-governmental organisations attended this event. The Permanent Representatives in the Member States were asked to nominate stakeholders to form country delegations. The proceeding of the conference can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/cyprus2008/index_en.htm</p>

Check your diaries to see if you are able to participate in these interesting upcoming events

<p>November 27-28</p>	<p><i>“Rural potentials for regional development”</i>, Vienna, Austria TERESA (types of interaction between environment, rural economy, society and agriculture in European regions) is a rural development research project co-funded under the 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development and conducted by 12 research institutions from all over Europe. The first day of the conference will look at policy approaches to rural development, with a keynote speech from Franz Fischler, former Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries. The second day will look at how rural development affects policy strategies and includes three workshops on local development strategies in rural regions. For further information about this conference, visit the TERESA website: http://www.teresa-eu.info/conference</p>
<p>December 1-2</p>	<p><i>“Challenges or Rural Development Policy – EAFRD and CAP Health Check”</i>, Berlin, Germany This event addresses national authorities in charge of the management of the EAFRD. It will focus on the role of the EAFRD and the CAP reform in the new programming period (2007-2013) and on the lessons learned from the previous period. It will provide the participants with an opportunity to meet representatives of the European institutions and share experiences with other Member States. Best practices and examples of the implementation of new programmes will be provided. For further information about this conference, visit the website of the European Academy for Taxes, Economics and Law: http://www.europaeische-akademie.net/en/veranstaltungen.html</p>

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